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LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIA.

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A LINGUISTIC FIELD SURVEY OF THE ENGLISH SPOKEN IN THE CULTURAL-GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF APPALACHIA SHOWS THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO MAJOR NONSTANDARD DIALECTS IN CURRENT USE. THE DIALECT FAMILY MOST COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE APPALACHIAN REGION IS MOUNTAIN SPEECH. ALTHOUGH WELL STRUCTURED AND EXPRESSIVE IN ITS OWN RIGHT, IT HAS COME TO BE CONSIDERED INFERIOR, UNGRAMMATICAL, AND OF LOW SOCIAL STATURE. THE NEGRO DIALECT SPOKEN IN APPALACHIA HAS EVEN LESS SOCIAL STATUS AND IS OFTEN MISTAKENLY IDENTIFIED WITH MOUNTAIN SPEECH. PROGRAMS FOR TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH IN THIS AREA SHOULD BE BASED ON A UNDERSTANDING OF WHICH ETHNIC AND CULTURAL GROUPS USE THESE DIALECTS, HOW EACH OF THE DIALECTS CONTRASTS WITH STANDARD ENGLISH, AND THE SPECIAL LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR TEACHING STANDARD ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF NONSTANDARD DIALECTS. THE AUTHOR BRIEFLY OUTLINES A WIDE RANGE OF RESEARCH, MATERIALS, AND ACTION PROGRAMS WHICH COULD BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE APPALACHIAN REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE TEACHING. HE ALSO APPENDS A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES, BOOKS, AND PAMPHLETS CONCERNED WITH LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE-RELATED SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN APPALACHIA. THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION PROGRAM OF THE CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS, 1717 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, WASHINGTON, D.C., 20036. (JD)

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by

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INTRODUCTION

When used in its broadest sense, the term Appalachia usually refers to an immense portion of the mid-Eastern United States -- one which includes all of West Virginia, the eastern thirds of Kentucky and Tennessee, and adjacent parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. Yet, in spite of the fact that the Appalachian region is dissected by a number of state boundaries, there are still at least two good reasons for considering it a single entity. The first reason is geographic; the region consists of a continuum of virtually uninterrupted mountain chains and hills.[1] The second reason is cultural; there exists within these mountains and hills a special kind of American, usually referred to as the Southern Highlander, or Southern Mountaineer. A common geographic and national origin before migration to Appalachia, plus the effect of similar ecological factors throughout the area of settlement, has led to the maintenance of a rather uniform mountain culture which, even today, results in striking similarities between individuals living as far apart as the coal mines of western Pennsylvania and the hills of northern Alabama.[2] Although for over a century and a half there had been little if any contact between mountaineers living in different parts of Appalachia, their cultural similarity was such that with the advent of technology and, with it, more efficient means of communication, citizens throughout the region were able to develop and become part of the Appalachian-wide networks of cultural exchange. For example, the radio contributed the technological means by which a country-music network, centering

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1. For details concerning the southern two-thirds of Appalachia, see Ford, 1962.
2. On mountain culture, see Weller, 1966.

in Nashville, was able to extend over the entire territory.

But while geographic isolation was largely responsible for the mountaineer's preservation of similar life-ways throughout Appalachia, it was also largely responsible for an increasing amount of cultural divergence between those of the mountaineer and the rest of the American population. For the difficulties of travel and transportation in Appalachia prevented the introduction of many of the cultural and technological changes which took place in "Outland" America -- particularly in the large cities on the East Coast and the Mid West -- during the course of the Nineteenth Century. By the end of the last century, differences in attitudes and life-ways between these mountaineers and other Americans had become so pronounced that misunderstandings and conflicts between the two were commonplace whenever they came into contact; the mountaineer was regarded by the outsider with amusement and even contempt, while the outsider was viewed by the mountaineer with suspicion. It is largely because of such differences that, even today, Appalachian mountaineers often have serious adjustment problems when -- as is becoming more and more the case -- economic blight forces them to leave their ancestral "hollers" and move to the big cities on either coast or around the Great Lakes. Of course, both this out-migration of the mountaineer and the adjustment problems which he is likely to encounter in his new environment pose special problems for public education in Appalachia, which must prepare the region's inhabitants not only for progress at home, but also for the eventuality of a highly competitive existence in some far-off city.

Even apart from the problem of preparing young people for out-migration, Appalachian education must still deal with a number of complications in the educational process

which have been created by recent changes, either in the nature of the Appalachian population itself, or in the avowed obligations of education to that population. One of the main changes in the Appalachian population which has occurred -- mostly since the Civil War period -- is the addition, to the mountaineer, of sizeable numbers of other kinds of persons. For example, there are today urban dwellers in Appalachia. Although the territory has obviously been less affected by urbanization than most other parts of the United States, cities have nevertheless grown up within Appalachia. None of them are really big cities, by national standards, yet many are big enough and old enough to have already developed distinctly urban cultural patterns, and to have attracted, over the decades, persons of a variety of types from outside the region. This has been especially true of the Appalachian cities like Charleston (West Virginia), Knoxville and Chattanooga (Tennessee), and Asheville (North Carolina). Even many mountaineers have left their rural hollers to settle down in such cities, and they have also contributed to Appalachia's growing urban population. The descendants of these mountaineers-turned-townsmen have produced a uniquely Appalachian kind of city culture -- one which represents a transitional stage between the values and life-ways of rural mountaineers and those of urbanites in the more cosmopolitan cities of the nation.

Another factor which has contributed to an increase in cultural complexity of the Appalachian population is the in-migration, particularly during the first part of the present century, of foreign groups, such as Italians, Poles, Germans, etc. They have moved, not only into the area's cities, but also into the more rural districts where mining

activities and lumber mills have offered opportunities. Although the Appalachian-born descendants of these foreign in-migrants have assimilated to the local culture in many ways, they still tend to remain distinct from the more traditional mountaineer. In recent years, with the development of technical industries in some Appalachian cities (for example, the chemical industry in Charleston and the electrical industry in Chattanooga), well-educated and highly trained technicians have been attracted and they have usually brought their families with them. Coming as they usually do from big coastal cities, these people have created in some Appalachian cities a new élite which is more closely in contact with American life outside of the region than the more traditional Appalachian educated class usually is. Although the members of this new group are still relatively uninvolved with other Appalachians -- and still largely unaccepted by them-- the fact that there is now, within the area, a highly prestigious segment of the population which behaves in terms of outland norms is bound to have an effect on all the inhabitants in the future.

Finally, the place of the Negro in Appalachia certainly deserves much more consideration than it has generally been given to date. Although the Negro accounts for a much smaller percentage of the total population of the region than in the southern lowlands, the Negro/white ratio in many Appalachian cities attains (and in Chattanooga exceeds by far) the national Negro/white ratio. There are even rural settlements of Negroes in some of the mountain counties of all the states extending into the section. Often from a family line which has been in Appalachia for generations, the rural Negro is increasingly forced into local cities by a lack of opportunity in the countryside. In these cities, the Negro's lot becomes much the same as in other American cities. Race-

caste phenomena keep him distinct from the rest of the population and make his poverty more endemic than that of the poor white. Thus, the Appalachian Negro continues, for generation after generation, to constitute a distinct cultural group within his region--behaving in terms of cultural norms which are in many ways quite different from those of the local whites. Consequently, the Appalachian Negro's needs are often rather different from those of the mountaineer. Yet, because the prototype of Appalachia is the white mountaineer, and because in comparison the Negro constitutes an embarrassingly different but (from the white point of view) unpicturesque minority, his needs are seldom given adequate consideration by local power structures.

Although the recognition of these ecological, sociological and ethnic differences within Appalachian society certainly adds complexity to the traditional view of it, as yet no comprehensive educational program for the region will be effective unless it takes account of these differences. This is certainly the case with language teaching, since all of these varibles, and others, have a direct correlation with language usage and language variation. A number of such correlations will be pointed out below. It should be made clear, however, that they are only rather general ones; much more detailed knowledge is still needed, and it will come only with carefully planned and executed investigation and research.

LINGUISTIC VARIATION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN APPALACHIA

With the settlement of Appalachia by pioneers of English-Scotch-Irish descent, English became virtually the only language used in the region. Some Indians (mostly Cherokees) preserved their original language, to be sure, but this did not happen on any significant scale. Nor was the later arrival of foreign language speaking immigrants in some parts of Appalachia substantial enough to affect the dominance of English. Yet, the English spoken in Appalachia today is by no means uniform. Rather, a number of varieties (or dialects, as the linguist calls them) are used. An understanding of the reasons for this and of the circumstances under which the different dialects of English are used is important in assessing the language teaching problems which Appalachian education must face today, and in the future.

Among the kinds of English used in Appalachia, that which undoubtedly has the greatest historical association with the region is Mountain Speech, so-called. Technically speaking, this term refers to a family of several closely related dialects, rather than to a single one. But, since they are structurally more like each other than they are like other dialects of American English, and since all are used by rural mountaineers living in adjacent areas, it is justifiable to refer to them collectively as Mountain Speech.

For the most part, Mountain Speech is the linguistic legacy of the folk speech of the early settlers, most of whom came into Appalachia from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas during the latter part of the Eighteenth Century. Although it has

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3. The history of the settlement of one important part of Appalachia is chronicled in Arnow, Seedtime on the Cumberland.

undoubtedly changed since that time, Mountain Speech seems to have done so less than the folk speech of other regions of America. The relatively archaic character of present-day Mountain Speech is manifested by the survival in it of speech-forms otherwise known primarily from Shakespearean literature, and has given rise to a popular idea that Mountain Speech is "pure Elizabethan English". It is really not, of course, since by the time the settlement of Appalachia had begun, English had already changed considerably from what it had been in Elizabethan times, a century and a half before.[4]

Today, for better or for worse and in spite of its regional seniority, Mountain Speech is no longer accepted by most Appalachians as a generally respectable way to talk. While many older mountaineers can undoubtedly still be found who use a more-or-less "pure" form of rural dialect, the younger ones have begun to reject the more rustic speech patterns in favor of standard English ones which they learn in school and hear on television and the radio. Of those who have given up Mountain Speech in the course of their education, some continue to harbor a private affection for their childhood dialect, and may even drop back into it occasionally when talking with rural neighbors or kin. Publicly, however, these same individuals are likely to pay lip service to deprecating stereotypes of rural dialect as imprecise, ungrammatical, and even comical.

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4. For an objective discussion of archaisms in the Ozark Mountain dialect, see the three articles by Randolph and Sankee. Although the Ozarks are geographically marginal to the Appalachian region considered here, their dialect clearly belongs to the Mountain Speech family.

The tragedy of the growing rejection of Mountain Speech is not so much that it is causing the rural dialects to die out (since, after all, no dialect survives or remains unchanged forever), but rather that the form it is taking is bound to cause the mountaineer to despise his own origins -- and unjustifiably so. For, from a linguistic point of view, no language or dialect (and this includes Mountain Speech) is inherently inferior to any other in its potential communicative efficiency. Some languages or dialects are rich and expressive in some ways, and others are equally rich and expressive in other ways. If a particular language or dialect has been used more than others for talking or writing about a particular subject, then it is likely to have developed a specialized vocabulary for dealing with that subject-- one which other languages or dialects may not have. However, this kind of communicative efficiency or "preciseness" is a result of adaptation to need, not of inherent characteristics. Furthermore, all languages, as well as all dialects within a language have their own grammatical structure (i.e., meaningful sentence-structure patterns), so that none is truly "ungrammatical". Therefore, a given dialect may be said to be "ungrammatical" only in the sense that its grammatical patterns have not been set forth formally in a grammar book or manual of style.

Virtually every spoken language exists in more than one variety, or dialect, the differences between which may be in pronunciation, grammatical patterns,

or vocabulary.[5] Sometimes different dialects of a language may be separated from each other by geographic or political boundaries. In such cases, the dialects may have FAIRLY equal status -- one being considered just as "good" as another. This is so, for example, with standard American English and standard British English. There are other cases, however, in which two or more dialects of the same language are used side by side within a single geographic or political domain. When this is the case, it is rare for them to have equal status. Instead, one dialect may come to be much more generally accepted than another. There are a number of reasons, sometimes interrelated, why one particular dialect may come to be regarded as "better" than others. For instance, it may have started out as the native speech of a socially or politically dominant group -- consequently, may have been chosen for producing the language's first literary works -- thereby becoming the basis for a standard written language -- in turn serving as the model for a normative grammatical tradition. An example of a dialect with such a history is standard British English as opposed to, say, Cockney dialect in London. Over the years, the former has been increasingly studied, analyzed, described, codified, taught, learned, and pontificated upon, while the latter has been increasingly condemned and ridiculed. Yet it is essentially

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5. Dialect differences analogous to those of spoken language may also occur in written language. Such is the case with variant spellings, e.g., British centre and colour, compared with the American center and color. These are purely written dialect differences, since the different spellings have nothing to do with differences in pronunciation.

because of the difference in treatment, rather than any difference in inherent linguistic superiority that standard British English is held to be "elegant", "precise", and "grammatical" while Cockney is said to be "coarse", "sloppy", and "faulty". One might compare such popular misconceptions about differences between dialects with ones about differences between members of social classes, castes, or ethnic groups in markedly stratified societies. In both cases, the cited characteristics of each are more likely to be a product of the ranking process than an explanation of it.

Social downgrading, in accommodation to an encroaching dialect of higher prestige, seems to have been the fate of Mountain Speech in Appalachia. As long as mountain life remained relatively well-isolated from the cosmopolitan ways and standardized speech of the big cities, Mountain Speech enjoyed general acceptance as the medium of oral communication.[6] But as contact between Appalachia and the "Outland" increased, and as cities grew up within the region, new influences began to exert themselves on mountain life. Among these was standard English, which began to replace or modify Mountain Speech to the extent that at least the older, more rustic and non-standard varieties

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6. For a description of the older, rural way of life in Appalachia, see Arnow, Flowering of the Cumberland.

began to disappear. Yet, the influence was not entirely one-way. For, while standard English affected Mountain Speech, standard English in Appalachia was in turn given a mountain flavor. -- particularly in pronunciation. Thus, the English of educated natives of Charleston, West Virginia, while quite acceptably standard, is still unmistakably Appalachian in sound.

The mountaineer who leaves his hill or holler to take up residence in an Appalachian city is faced with a linguistic adjustment problem. He is expected to modify his Mountain Speech patterns further in the direction of standard English than would be necessary in a rural community. But since the standard English of Appalachian cities uses essentially the same sound system as Mountain Speech, and even some of the same idiomatic constructions, the transition may be a relatively painless one -- involving substitutions in grammatical patterns and vocabulary for the most part. Furthermore, any linguistic difficulties which the mountaineer might experience are eased by the fact that Appalachian urbanites are accustomed to, and tend to be tolerant of, compromises between city English and Mountain Speech. The situation will be altogether different, however, when the mountaineer moves instead to one of the large Outland cities. There the urban English will not even have a sound system which is similar to Mountain Speech, so that the in-migrant mountaineer will brand himself as a "hillbilly " with every utterance.

Although Mountain Speech is undoubtedly the variety of non-standard English most widely used in Appalachia, it is not the only one. For most of the region's less educated Negroes speak a type of non-standard English which, for practical purposes, one may call Negro Dialect. However, it should be understood that, as in the case of Mountain Speech, this term refers not to one dialect, but rather to several closely related ones.

Because of its non-standard nature, Negro Dialect is generally considered to be "ungrammatical", just as Mountain Speech is. However, since Negro Dialect is spoken by persons who have traditionally been relegated to low rank in the American race-caste system, it has even less social status than Mountain Speech -- so much less, in fact, that many of those who are associated with Negro Dialect (either as speakers of it, or simply as Negroes) go so far as to deny its very existence. Some do this by maintaining that the speech of uneducated Negroes is no different from that of uneducated whites. Yet, although this may or may not be true for some areas of the United States, it is certainly not the case in Appalachia. There, Negro Dialect differs from both the Mountain Speech of the rural whites and the city speech of the urban whites in many details of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.[7] Others who would not deny that some Negroes do speak a distinct dialect still object to the

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7. The network of differences and similarities between Mountain Speech and Negro Dialect, and between each of these and standard English is a complicated one. For example, Mountain Speech is usually "r-ful" (meaning that final or preconsonantal r is pronounced in words like war, dark, etc.), while Negro Dialect is generally "r-less" (meaning that no actual r is pronounced in such words, although the vowel may be lengthened). Both usages are acceptable in standard English, except that r-less pronunciations of words like door, more, (continued)

designation "Negro Dialect", pointing out that the kind of speech it refers to is not used by all Negroes. This is certai nly true, but it is interesting that the analagous objection is never raised about Mountain Speech -- that it is not used by all mountaineers. Of course, what justifies the designation "Mountain Speech" is not that it is used by all mountaineers, but rather that it is used almost exclusively by mountaineers. By the same token, the "Negro" in "Negro Dialect" refers to its virtually exclusive use by Negroes, not to universal use by Negroes.

There are many reasons why Negro Dialect is different from Mountain Speech in Appalachia, and none of them have anything to do with physiological or mental differences -- real or imagined -- between Negroes and whites. Instead the differences have to do in great part with different migration patterns; while whites came

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(continued)
must end more like Noah than like no. A somewhat different relationship holds for the possessive suffix -s, however. While both Mountain Speech and standard English always use the suffix in constructions of the type John's hat, Negro Dialect can form its equivalent, John hat, without the suffix. While Mountain Speech and Negro Dialect both deviate from the standard English use of the verb to be, they do so in different ways. For standard English we're friends, for example, Mountain Speech is likely to yield we's friends, which does have the linking verb, although in a different form than standard English in that case. But in Negro Dialect one finds an additional equivalent, we friends, with no linking verb at all. Of course, the foregoing are only isolated examples of the structural characteristics of the three principal varieties of Appalachian English. An understanding of the total relationship of each of these forms of English to the others can only be gained by a rather complete description and comparison of their linguistic structures. Just the same, there seems to be enough evidence to justify the conclusion that, for historical reasons, Mountain Speech is structurally somewhat closer to standard English than Negro Dialect is. Even so, there are still instances in which Negro Dialect agrees with standard English, while Mountain Speech does not.

into Appalachia largely from Midland and Northern territories fo the East, the region's Negroes came in largely from the South Atlantic plantation area. Thus, Negro Dialect differs from Mountain Speech partly in that it has more Southern dialect features. Furthermore, Negro Dialect also differs from Mountain Speech in having structural traces of the older plantation creole English from which it in part derives.[8] While the speech of some whites in the Deep South may also have some creole features (due to prolonged contact between whites and Negroes in the plantation area), this is generally not the case with white Appalachian mountaineers.[9]

Just as the speech of Appalachian whites differs between mountaineers and city dwellers, Negro Dialect has both rural and urban varieties -- the urban variety being somewhat closer to standard English, as least in vocabulary.[10] Finally, there is a numerically small but socially important group of urban Negroes in Appalachia who do not speak any kind of non-standard dialect. Their English figures among the most standard found in the region.

The foregoing discussion of linguistic variation in Appalachia has concentrated on two variables: ecology (rural/urban) and ethnicity (white/Negro). Cutting across these (although partly affected by them) are three other variables which influence linguistic variation and language learning. These are age, sex, and education.

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8. For a discussion of the origin of creole traits in American Negro speech, see Stewart, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the History of American Negro Dialects".
9. See McDavid and McDavid, "The Relationship of the Speech of American Negroes to the Speech of Whites".
10. For a discussion of dialect variation in the urban Negro community of Washington, D.C., see Stewart, "Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting English Teaching". The urban Negro dialect situation in Charleston, W.V. and Chattanooga, Tenn. are in many ways similar to that in Washington, D.C., though of course on a smaller scale.

Differences in the age of the speaker are matched by difference in language usage in virtually all societies. In the very early years (roughly the first four or five), many of the special characteristics of a child's speech are manifestations of first-language acquisition -- that is, the interaction between the neurological development which allows a human being to learn a language for the first time, and the social process of actually acquiring it. After this developmental period is over, the differences between child and adult language are almost entirely social in nature, and often derive from the fact that children in many societies associate more with other children their own age than they do with older persons. One interesting Appalachian social phenomenon which has to do with this is that Negro children seem to be oriented more toward age-graded peer groups of this type, while white children tend to be oriented more toward family units.[11] Even in cases where children are family-oriented, other social factors may operate to make their speech different from that of their parents. For example, children may be more under the care of their grandparents, and thus preserve older dialect features which their parents might have given up.

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11. The "youth reference group" mentioned by Weller (Yesterday's People, pp. 68-72) might appear to be an example of white mountain age-grading, but it is really a young-adult group -- quite different in structure and function from the age-grades so common among younger Negro children (particularly boys). Correlated with the apparent differences in age-grading between whites and Negroes in Appalachia seems to be a difference in the importance of the family unit itself.

Differences in language usage between the sexes at virtually all ages are probably much less the product of hormones than they are of social differentiation. In almost every human society, males and females are taught to behave differently, and this usually includes the ways of speaking.

Finally, the educational process itself can have a decided effect on an individual's language behavior -- particularly if it is reinforced by high educational standards at the family or neighborhood level. But the role of education alone in affecting the language habits of an individual, a community, or a region must not be oversimplified. It interacts with other social factors, such as social structure and individual goals, in complicated and little-understood ways. For example, archaic or radically non-standard dialect features may be preserved, by means of age-grading, in the speech of generation after generation of pre-school children, even though formal education may discourage or eliminate such features in the speech of such children when they enter school and become adults.

Another linguistic phenomenon which presents problems for the Appalachian schools is the retention by older children (some even in their early teens) of non-standard speech features which must have started out as developmental ones (i.e., as "baby-talk") since they are a part of no well-formed English dialect. Such features include a lack of distinction between pre-vocalic l, r, and w sounds (e. g., a pronunciation of weed for lead and read, as

well as weed), the failure to produce normal consonant clusters (e.g., a pronunciation krait for straight), etc. This phenomenon seems to be far too widespread among white mountaineer children in Appalachia to be regarded as simply random fixation in a baby talk stage by some individuals, and the fact that it is relatively uncommon among white city and Appalachian Negro children makes it seem obvious that its causes must lie in some relationship between language learning, social structure and formal education.[12] What may well be the case is that developmental phenomena are eliminated less by peer group imitation in the family-oriented white mountaineer child than in the peer group-oriented urban white or Negro child. For some mountaineer children, actual physical isolation may reinforce this social isolation from other youngsters outside the family. At the same time, age-grading in mountain society discourages the mountaineer child from imitating his elders to any full degree until he is ready to become an adult himself. Reinforced by a lack of formal education, age-grading also inhibits correction by adults of developmental features in their offspring ("That's jist the natcherl way fer young-uns to talk").

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12. To my knowledge, this phenomenon has not yet been dealt with in any serious way, or even remarked upon by Appalachian educators. I noticed it during a recent survey of language usage in Southern Appalachia. Although my sample for that survey was small, the distribution of this phenomenon was so striking within it that I would be quite surprised should further investigation show that either its distribution or its causes were other than I suggest here.

LANGUAGE TEACHING PROBLEMS IN APPALACHIA

During the past decade, there has been a great deal of national attention focused on such problematic aspects of Appalachian life as geographic and cultural isolation, endemic poverty, and technological backwardness. While undoubtedly motivated by the best of intentions, this public airing of what many Appalachians probably consider to be their "dirty laundry" has frequently combined too much zeal in the search for problems with too little analysis of them once they are found. The result has been to create misunderstanding, where understanding was the goal, by giving the nation an overly pessimistic picture of just what Appalachian life is really like. For example, an outland educator could easily get the impression that formal education in the region is characteristically antiquated and inept. Although this may be somewhat the case with the more isolated rural schools (usually of the "one room" type), it is no more true for Appalachia's urban schools than it is for urban schools in other parts of the nation. The schools in such cities as Charleston, Knoxville, Clinton and Chattanooga are usually well run, and staffed with imaginative and highly motivated teachers. In fact, this is even true of some of Appalachia's rural schools as well. Where inadequate instruction does exist, it is more likely to be the result of a lack of resources, or of the training necessary to deal with special problems, than it is to be the result of a lack of motivation.

Because the national assessment of the state of Appalachian education puts matters in such an unfavorable light, the region's educators often become excessively defensive, focusing even more on achievements and overlooking failures even more than is usually the practice with teachers. Understandable though this defensive reaction may be, however, it can easily do the cause of Appalachian education more harm than good. For the sweeping-under-the-rug of chronic failures in the classroom can easily blind one to the basic problems which give rise to such failures -- problems which could eventually be dealt with if only faced up to and accounted for. For example, in a locality where most of the population speaks a non-standard dialect of English, an understandable pride on the part of the teacher and the community in the success of those few pupils who somehow do learn standard English may draw attention away from the unpleasant fact that such success is exceptional -- that the majority of pupils never do acquire, either in the classroom or outside of it, an acceptable command of the standard language. In this way, the problem of actually turning the majority of pupils into educational successes may be postponed indefinitely.

Complicated as educational improvement may be by regional defensiveness, it may be even further complicated by ethnic defensiveness in certain cases.

For example, no matter how true it may be, the observation that many if not most Appalachian Negroes talk more like Negroes in other parts of the United States than they do like Appalachian whites may sound dangerously like racial stereotyping to many social-conflict-wary teachers. Consequently, they might insist upon applying the same corrective techniques to Negro Dialect speakers as to those who use Mountain Speech, with the predictable result that Negro failures in the English classrooms of Appalachia would not decrease to any significant degree. In such a case, commitment to a well-meant but superficial concept of "togetherness" could actually help to prolong deep-seated ethnic inequity.

Distracting as they are, regional and ethnic defense mechanisms are not the only obstacles to effective language teaching in Appalachia. More problematic still are some very common misunderstandings about the nature of the educational problems of socio-economically "disadvantaged" youngsters, both in Appalachia and in other parts of the nation. Many teachers, relying heavily on the traditional philosophy of their profession for an understanding of what they are doing, actually believe that they are teaching Truth. Accordingly, the language and cultural norms which they teach, and which are embodied in innumerable textbooks, are regarded as being maximally well-formed and logical. From this point of view, the child who deviates from classroom expectations seems to be failing to understand or appreciate natural order or basic good sense. It then follows that the way to help

such children is simply to expose them to more intensive doses of the classroom norms, until they finally see the light. All in all, this approach to teaching the disadvantaged is pathetically similar to the linguistic technique of the unsophisticated traveler abroad who believes that foreigners will understand his own language if only he shouts it loudly enough.[13]

What is more likely to be the case is that socio-economically disadvantaged children have social behavioral patterns which are well-formed and "logical" in their own terms, but that these differ from those taught in the classroom and expected from all who would enter the mainstream of American life. The fact that the disadvantaged should often turn out to be culturally different (from middle-class Americans) ought not to be too surprising, since one of the main reasons why a particular segment of the national population may be economically underprivileged is that it has been excluded from mainstream life, either by the barriers of a race-caste system (as in the case of the American Negro) or by geographic isolation (as in the case of the Appalachian mountaineer). This social

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13. The same assumptions, clothed in a technological guise, underlie proposals for exposing the disadvantaged child to increasing amounts of raw output from the media (radio and television). I will merely point out that in many parts of South America, where (because of the extensive use of videotaped programs from the United States) a substantial amount of local television broadcasting is in English, there seems to be no evidence that local Spanish or Portuguese speaking viewers are learning much English from the experience. As an adjunct to carefully planned and controlled teaching techniques, the media are of immense value. Used alone, they will probably remain ineffective.

or geographic isolation would have encouraged the development and maintenance of social norms (both in language and in other kinds of cultural behavior) which might be unique to the particular group, and thereby set its members off from other people even further.

Once this is understood to be so, the process of teaching the disadvantaged child takes on an entirely different character. Instead of being considered inattentive, lazy, malicious, or mentally deficient, the disadvantaged child who chronically fails in the classroom can be seen to be confused by two conflicting (but often somewhat similar, and therefore not easily distinguishable) norms of behavior. In terms of language teaching, this means that the problematic child is not so much likely to be verbally destitute as he is to be confused by the differences between his own non-standard dialect and the standard English taught at school. Precisely because his non-standard dialect is a variety of English, similarities between it and standard English may make it especially difficult for the child (and, in fact, for the teacher as well) to be sure where one leaves off and the other begins. It should therefore be clear that, for teaching standard English to speakers of non-standard dialects (such as Mountain Speech or Negro Dialect), the best techniques will be those which are specifically de-

signed to teach the patterns and habits of standard English to persons (of whatever age) who already know a different set of language patterns and habits. Such techniques have already been developed for teaching English as a foreign language to speakers of other languages, and an increasing number of linguists and educators are now recommending that such techniques, adapted to deal with the specific linguistic differences involved, be used for teaching (standard) English to the disadvantaged.[14]

When first encountered, the idea that the disadvantaged child may have a language and culture of his own can be terribly threatening to the teacher who assumes that there is only one way of talking English, or only one way of being American. For it not only goes against the American Dream of cultural unity, which she probably teaches in Social Life class (a myth predicated on fantasy and intolerance, if ever I saw one), but it also robs her of the strongest crutch she has for teaching English -- an appeal to some sort of absolute, universal order and logic. Yet, the really

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14. In recommendations for the use of foreign language teaching methods in English for the disadvantaged, the word foreign bothers some people who are otherwise sympathetic to the idea. Here, foreign means merely "unlike standard English". It must not be taken to mean "un-American" in any way, since the linguistic ancestors of many non-standard dialects have been in the New World just as long as any linguistic ancestor of present-day standard English has.

bright and dedicated teacher will not take long to see the advantages of an approach which gives some insight into what is going on in the child's mind, which explains the reasons for his otherwise unreasonable mistakes, and which allows for a considerable amount of control over the teaching process. One good example should illustrate these advantages.

It is well known by Appalachian teachers that many of the children who come to school speaking a non-standard dialect will experience chronic difficulty in the "correct" use of many standard English patterns. Among these is the present durative form of the verb, e.g., he is working (or its contracted form, he's working). Many teachers have noticed that these children do not necessarily produce the same "incorrect" form all the time, and the particularly observant teacher may even have noticed that the variant patterns produced differ somewhat between children who know Mountain Speech and those who know Negro Dialect. A listing of variant forms equivalent to standard English he (i)s working to be heard from such children in a first grade classroom would be:

Mountain Children	Negro Children
he's workin'	he workin'
he's a-workin'	he be workin'

Now, since all of these patterns are used where only the one pattern (he (i)s working) would be used in standard English, it is easy to see how the teacher could come to the conclusion that the speech patterns of such children are inconsistent, and perhaps even imprecise. Once this interpretation is accepted, it is only natural for the teacher to assume that the children's verbal behavior can be changed by teaching the children to articulate and express themselves more clearly. Unfortunately, such an approach is destined to have only random success in eliminating the use of "incorrect" forms; for the most part, it will fail. What is tragic about such failure is not only that it frequently besets experienced teachers, in good schools, teaching bright children, but also that it is so easy to eliminate -- once it becomes understood what the children's real problem is, and what the teacher should do about it.

A good linguist would approach such a problem, first by assuming that the average child's speech is probably well-formed, consistent and meaningful -- no matter how non-standard it may be. In other words, it is probably a perfectly well-developed linguistic system, like adult speech is. Of course, the linguist is aware that a child five, or six, or seven years old has simply not had the learning experiences(including those involving the use of language) that a full-grown adult has had, so that

the child's full language repertoire may be somewhat less elaborate than that of an adult. However, the linguist knows that this difference mostly involves specialized vocabulary and unusual sentence patterns, and that the basic language patterns of a child (at least after the fifth or sixth year) are likely to be much like those of an adult. At the same time, the linguist also knows that different languages (or different dialects) are to a certain extent arbitrary in what they do or don't do, so that even if a child has as well-formed a basic linguistic system as the adult has, the child's language may have a different structure than the adult's language. This is especially likely to be the case if the child is a speaker of non-standard dialect while the adult is a speaker of standard English, or vice-versa. The implication of this fact for the English teaching problem just mentioned is rather profound, for it means that if a pupil uses two different patterns where standard English uses only one, it may well be that his language behavior is not inconsistent, but rather that his dialect makes a distinction which standard English does not make at all. It is because of such possibilities that the linguist starts by taking the child's speech on its own grounds, observing and analyzing it to see how it functions.

What the linguist finds when he examines the Appalachian dialect situation is precisely what was suggested -- that both Mountain Speech and Negro Dialect

make grammatical distinctions within the range of the durative construction of standard English, e.g., he is working. In Mountain Speech, the distinction is indicated by the presence or absence of a verbal prefix a-. This prefix shows that the action of the verb is indefinite in space or time, while its absence implies that the action is immediate in space or time. Thus, he's a-workin' in Mountain Speech means either that the subject has a steady job, or that he is away (out of sight, for example) working somewhere. On the other hand, he's workin' in Mountain Speech means that the subject is doing a specific task, close by.[15] A similar, (though not identical) grammatical distinction is indicated in Negro Dialect by the verbal auxiliary be.[16]

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15. The meaning of the verbal prefix a- in Mountain Speech as stated here is only approximate. It is based entirely on my own observations, since I have not seen any previous study of this phenomenon by other linguists or dialectologists. Admittedly, the use of a- seems elusive when one attempts to elicit the reactions of Mountain Dialect speakers, but this elusiveness probably lies, not in any marginal function, but rather in the fact that it expresses a distinction not easily translatable into standard English.

16. Unlike the a- of Mountain Speech, Negro Dialect be does not necessarily indicate that the action is remote in space. On the other hand, Negro Dialect be is also used with predicated adjectives (e.g., he be busy, "he is habitually busy" as distinct from he busy, "he is busy at this moment"), while a- cannot be used with adjectives in Mountain Speech. Furthermore, some Appalachian Negroes seem to have both be and a-, with the latter indicating only remoteness in space. For such speakers, he be workin' would mean "he is habitually working close by", while he be a-workin' would mean "he is habitually working way off somewhere". This kind of dialect usage was not included in the sample teaching problem, since it would have complicated it unnecessarily.

Since these grammatical distinctions seem just as necessary, natural and logical to the non-standard speakers as, say, the distinction between past and present tense seems to a speaker of standard English, the former are simply not prepared for the possibility that the kind of English they are hearing in the classroom makes no such distinction. Consequently, upon seeing or hearing standard English he (i)s working, the Mountain child will equate it only with his he's workin' (and will continue to use he's a-workin' as well), while the Negro Dialect child will equate it only with his he workin' (and will continue to use he be workin' as well).[17] For his or her part, the teacher will wrongly consider the different dialect forms to be cases of random variation, since they all correspond to a single pattern in standard English.

Borrowing from foreign language teaching techniques, a much more effective way of teaching the standard English durative construction to users of Mountain Speech or Negro Dialect would be one which would take specific account of the structural differences between these dialects and standard

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17. In fact, one can often hear cases where Negro Dialect speakers have "corrected" this be to bees (e.g., he bees working), so sure are they that standard English must have a similar grammatical device.

English. In this case, the pupils would be taught to collapse the non-standard grammatical distinction (shown by the presence and absence of a- and be) when speaking standard English. This would be done by drilling them on using the same standard English pattern both for the meaning of non-specific space or time and specific space or time, e.g.,

he's working right here -- he's working somewhere

he's working right there --he's working down the river.

he's working right now -- he's working every day.

he's working today -- he's working all next week.

In some cases, the teacher might even explain the difference between the non-standard dialect and standard English to the pupils.

If the foregoing example were to be multiplied many times over, to account for the numerous structural differences between the non-standard dialect of the mountain or Negro child and the standard language which he is expected to learn in school, one can get some idea of the pressing need for further dialect studies in Appalachia, and for the incorporation of the findings of such studies into improved language teaching methods and teacher training programs.

When it becomes clear how different a non-standard dialect may be from standard English, and yet how masked these differences may be by superficial similarities between the dialects, it will be much easier to appreciate the extent to which structural conflicts between the language of the child and the language of the school can contribute to poor learning and poor teaching. And the problem is not restricted to the acquisition of standard oral English; it affects learning to read, and even the learning of other subjects as well.

When a standard English speaking child learns to read, his task is essentially one of decoding the graphic representation of a language which is very much like the one he already uses. For him, the reading problem is basically just that -- a reading problem. However, when a child who has not learned how to speak standard English is asked to learn to read in it, his task will be infinitely more difficult -- and perhaps even senseless. For even if he succeeds in decoding the written forms of individual words, such a child may find that they do not go together in any (to him) familiar

or meaningful pattern.[18]

Finally, it may well be the case that many of the learning difficulties which the disadvantaged characteristically have with such "non-language" subjects as mathematics and science are also due to dialect differences. For it must be remembered that mathematics and science courses are taught in standard English. Therefore, even a child with high natural ability in these fields may experience difficulty in understanding classroom instruction in these subjects, and in articulating what he does understand, if that child does not know standard English. Thus, what looks at first like a lack of technological aptitude on the part of the disadvantaged child might turn

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18. Once, while teaching a course on the language and culture of the disadvantaged at The Johns Hopkins University, I decided to show the class how different from standard English the speech of some Americans is by reading a story in Gullah (a kind of creole English spoken along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia). A particularly observant teacher who was taking the course pointed out that, when I read the Gullah story, I exhibited many of the "poor reader" phenomena which she had seen so often when her non-standard speaking pupils tried to read a standard English text, e.g., tenseness, false starts, corrections, long pauses, etc. She was absolutely right; although I am a fluent reader of standard English, I was still learning Gullah at the time, and my reading of the Gullah story was adversely affected by my lack of familiarity with the linguistic system I was trying to decode.

out to be more a language problem than anything else.[19]

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19. The idea, often expressed by educators who should know better, that mountaineer children do poorly in science and technology because their way of life does not prepare them for such topics, seems to be particularly absurd in view of the extent to which technological skills are evident in and disseminated by many of the traditional mountaineer crafts. See Allen H. Eaton, Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1937.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMS FOR APPALACHIA

The following programs vary greatly in cost, scope, technical level, and direct involvement with the schools. However, they are all concerned with the improvement of language teaching in Appalachia, and as such are examples of the wide range of language-oriented programs which the Appalachian Regional Educational Laboratory could undertake, support, or cooperate in.

A. Research Programs

1. A study of the grammatical structure of Mountain Speech and/or Negro Dialect as used by pre-school children in one or more parts of Appalachia, followed by a comparison of these with the grammatical structure of standard English.

2. The testing of attitudes toward Mountain Speech and Appalachian city speech by typical members of the populations of outland cities to which Appalachians commonly migrate (e.g., Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago). Ideally, such a study would show which dialect features have the least social acceptance outside of Appalachia.

3. A study of the language learning process in a representative group of white mountaineers in an isolated area.

4. A study of the language learning process in a representative group of Appalachian Negroes.

5. A study of verbal strategies (when, to whom, and how do messages get expressed) in a white mountain and/or Appalachian Negro community.

6. Current informal techniques used by Appalachian teachers for encouraging verbal behavior in the child and/or dealing with non-standard dialect. This study would involve a great deal of observation of the behavior of teachers and children in the classroom.

7. A study of current teacher attitudes toward non-standard dialect.

B. Materials Programs

1. The development of special, linguistically planned materials for teaching standard English to non-standard dialect speakers in Appalachia (white mountaineer or Negro). This program would have to follow Research Program No. 1.

2. The compiling of a pronunciation handbook of Appalachian standard English, showing regional variant pronunciations which have general acceptability.

3. The development of Mountain Speech or Negro Dialect readers, to be used for catch-up reading work by non-standard dialect speakers who have not acquired a command of standard English by the time they must learn to read.
4. The development of an Appalachian language teacher's manual, to explain the nature of language, of dialect variation in Appalachia, and to indicate special techniques for teaching standard English to speakers of non-standard dialects.

C. Action Programs

1. Pre-school language teaching for culturally disadvantaged children.
2. Special training programs for language teachers.
3. Materials tryout programs in the schools for materials developed in any of the above programs.

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